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ANOTHER "WITCH'S LADDER." — In vol. iv. p. 168, is an account, by Mrs. Eustace B. Rogers, of the manner in which the boys of Florence once a year, "nella mezza quaresima," are accustomed to cut from paper rude images of a ladder (recalling the crucifixion) which they stick or place on the backs of people, generally ladies, as they pass.

I have found by much inquiry that there is almost no superstition or popular observance in Italy which has not a background — and sometimes a very prominent middle distance — of antique heathenism or sorcery. There always lurks a witch behind the cross, and one can scent the old Etruscan *demonifuge* in the incense which perfumes Santa Croce. So on inquiring of a living chronicle of popular folk-lore what was the true inwardness of the putting ladders on passers-by, she replied: —

"*E un usanza lasciata dai vecchi antichi* — it is a custom of the *old ancients*" (not meant for a pleonasm, but to signify very ancient people) — that as Jesus Christ carried the ladder and cross to Calvary, so we should bear it. But no witch can endure to have one of these ladders on her, so if you would find whether a woman be one, put one on her back and say: —

Let the ladder ever stay!
And no one carry it away!
If she be a witch, 't is plain,
On her the ladder won't remain,
And she'll run away in pain.

But the ladder was one of the good or healthy — that is, witch-driving fetishes, or amulets, or signs long before the Crucifixion. It was a very old Roman custom, as it is to-day in the Romagna, to tie a patient to a ladder to secure the proper action of a medical remedy. It is a rule, I think without exception, that where we find a formula for banishing the sorceress in northern Italy, associated with some object, we find an old heathen rite.

Charles Godfrey Leland.

FLORENCE, ITALY, February 1, 1892.

PRIMITIVE MARRIAGE CUSTOMS AS PRESERVED IN THE GAMES OF CHILDREN. — A very common childish game, in which marriage is represented, is that of the "Knights of Spain," and its numerous varieties. This game, in many forms, has been widely diffused through all the countries of central and western Europe.

Here come three lords out of Spain,
A-courtin' of your daughter Jane.

My daughter Jane is yet too young,
To be ruled by your flattering tongue.

Be she young, or be she old,
'T is for the price she may be sold.

I have pointed out, in "Games and Songs of American Children," that the game involves the idea of marriage by purchase (Nos. 1, 2, 3). But there is another element of the song which I did not understand at the time when my notes on the game were written. This is the choice made by the

suitors, or rather the ambassadors of the suitor, among the girls present. After the Spanish knight has been turned away, the mother relents and addresses him :—

Turn back, turn back, you Spanish knight,
And choose the fairest in your sight.

He takes a girl, but (in one of the versions) brings her back to the party from which she has been taken. So in an Italian form, where he advances and takes the girl by the hand ; then, as if changing his mind, rejects her, saying : “ And now I don’t want her,” assigning as a reason that she is too ugly. Now this selection among the players appears to be not merely a usage of the game, but a part of the original practice, which included search among a number while the true bride is disguised, and the wooer is thus liable to make a false choice.

The successive advancing and retiring of the marriage party, indicated in the game, also appears to be a reminiscence of early custom, in which the wooers are turned away at first, and only accepted after repeated applications, and a long negotiation. The whole game, if this view is correct, thus more or less literally represents the actual marriage usages which obtained in Europe up to a comparatively late period, and which included such a procession on the part of the friends of the bridegroom, reiterated appeals and rejection, and final selection of the proper bride, who is in disguise among her friends, and probably also a chase at the end, a reminiscence of marriage by capture. This conclusion may appear somewhat speculative, but appears to me to be made fairly probable by the consideration that in Wales, at least, a marriage ceremony containing all these features was actually in vogue until within a short time. This interesting fact is made clear by a statement of Professor Rhys, made at the recent International Folk-Lore Congress in London, in reference to an experience of his own youth. Dr. M. Winteritz, in a paper on “ Indo-European Customs, with Special Reference to Marriage Customs,” had concluded that the primitive Indo-European community had already arrived at a stage where marriage by capture was only surviving in a number of customs as sham capture. On this Professor Rhys remarked as follows :—

As to the marriage by capture, he himself remembered witnessing, when a boy, one of these *quasi*-capture weddings in Wales. He went early to the bride’s house, and at a certain hour the door was barred. The bridegroom’s party approached to get the bride, but entrance was denied. They then parleyed with the bride’s father, the whole conversation being conducted in verse. While this was going on the bride was disguised, and when all the poetry had been finished the bridegroom’s party were allowed to come in. Then they had to search for the bride, whom, in this case, they failed to discover, her disguise being so effective. After a time they all set out for the church, and at a point where two roads forked the bride and her father endeavored to get away along the wrong road. They were, however, immediately brought back by the bridegroom’s party.

If such customs survived in Wales in the nineteenth century, they probably lingered elsewhere in Europe during the Middle Age, and the game which I am considering may very well depend upon them.

W. W. Newell.